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ABSTRACT

A study examined (1) how advertising practitioners perceive research related to their profession, (2) how advertising practitioners learn of current research results, and (3) how, if at all, advertising practitioners use research. Individual discussions with advertising practitioners in the San Diego market led to an initial bank of items from which final, 50-item questionnaires were constructed. These were sent to 283 advertising agencies, 96 of whom responded. Data from the 76 usable responses showed that applied research is used frequently in a day-to-day problem solving context, but theoretical research appears to be rarely used. Practitioners had positive perceptions of the value of applied research, and the more positive the practitioners' orientations to science, the more favorable was their perception of theoretical research. The analysis indicated a strong, positive relationship between practitioner perception of research and agency use of research. These results suggest that the gap between academics and advertising practitioners has narrowed. (SRT)

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ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS' USES AND PERCEPTIONS OF RESEARCH

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ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS' USES AND PERCEPTIONS OF RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Due, in part, to an increased sophistication on the part of consumers, coupled with major changes in the communication industry, the advertising industry has begun to reconsider not only its research methods, but also its theoretical grounding. The need for quality consumer research, based on a solid, theoretical foundation, is rapidly increasing. Traditionally, academics and advertising practitioners have held very different views with respect to the value, and use of, applied and theoretical research. While much of the early literature suggested that practitioners only occasionally use applied research, and rarely use theoretical research, recent studies have suggested that practitioners do use research but that applied research is highly visible and use is easy to measure. On the other hand, theoretical research is used in an enlightenment function - over time - and that its use is more difficult to measure. The concept of perception has been employed here to measure the enlightenment function of theoretical research. The data here uphold the value of using perception as a research concept for this research question. These data also support the hypothesis that practitioners use both applied and theoretical research far more than had been speculated earlier.

ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS' USES AND PERCEPTIONS OF RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION:

The field of advertising is currently undergoing a period of transition. An increased sophistication on the part of consumers (due in part to the proliferation of consumer advocacy groups and agencies), coupled with major changes in the communication industry (such as cable television, fiber optics, satellite communication and computer communication etc.), has forced the advertising industry to reconsider not only its methods, but its theoretical base as well. The need for quality consumer research, based on solid, theoretical foundations, is rapidly increasing. To learn more about what is being done with respect to this need, the following research was designed to examine advertising practitioners' uses and perceptions of research.

In 1969 Leonard Goodwin wrote, "... the materialistic orientation of business enterprise and the academic orientation often appear in tension... An undercurrent of suspicion still separates the academic and business worlds." Almost one decade later Holbert echoed this concern: "Academic and business research are sometimes so divergent, it is difficult to believe that they are addressing themselves to the same kinds of tasks" (1976).

One frequently suggested reason for this division is that academics and practitioners have very different end-goals and needs when conducting research. Practitioner, or applied, research has been characterized by its functionality, and its problem-solving orientation. In contrast, academic, or theoretical, research is commonly an exercise that contributes to the general growth of knowledge, rather than to the solution of specific problems (Deshpande and Zaltman, 1982). Others have noted that the

distinction between the two types of research is exemplified by the concepts "instrumental utilization," characterized by the decision-driven function of research, and "conceptual utilization" defined as knowledge for understanding (Rich, 1975 and Caplan 1975).

Instrumental utilization of research is immediate and relatively straight forward. These attributes make measurement fairly simple in terms of both short-term application to immediate problems, as well as long-term planning applications. On the other hand, conceptual utilization is very similar to what Weiss (1980) has termed "the enlightenment function" of research and is more difficult to operationalize.

Much of the current literature suggests that advertising practitioners underutilize both applied and theoretical research in contexts other than short-term, problem-oriented situations. Weiss however, contended that practitioners do, in fact, use research far more extensively than indicated in the literature but that research affects policy and decision making over time and its greatest impact is through an enlightenment function. Conceptually, this function is the gradual sedimentation of insights, theories, concepts and ways of looking at the world rather than through problem solving or "social engineering" (Johnson, 1980). Unlike instrumental utilization, the impact of research's enlightenment function is not immediate or straight forward and therefore is more difficult to measure.

Despande and Zaltman (1984) recently argued that the measurement of practitioners' "perceptions" of research is a valid tap of practitioners' level of "use" in terms of the enlightenment function of research. Utilizing this concept an attempt to measure the extent of the enlightenment function by measuring practitioners' perceptions of both theoretical and applied research was made.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION:

Today, academicians' are interested in conducting, reviewing and sharing research within their chosen areas of study. This is indicated by the high levels of attendance at professional and scholarly conferences, the flood of papers presented at those conferences and the increasing pressure by universities for strong publication records of their faculty. Also clear is that very large market research agencies conduct millions of dollars of research each year - the top 10 U.S. private market research agencies billed more than 700 million dollars in 1980 -- (Deshpande and Zaltman, 1982). What is not clear, however, is the use and perception of research by advertising practitioners in agencies other than major market research agencies.

Because of the changing environment and because of the knowledge gaps vis a vis practitioners' use and perceptions of advertising research, the following questions are explored here: 1) How do advertising practitioners perceive research related to their profession 2) How do advertising practitioners learn of current research results and 3) How, if at all, do advertising practitioners use research? Also explored relationships between advertising practitioners perceptions of research, and agency use of research.

METHODS:

Individual discussions with advertising practitioners in the San Diego market led to an initial bank of items related to use and perceptions of advertising research and theory. These items were pilot tested, revised and retested. From the results of that testing, a final questionnaire was constructed. The measurement instrument, a 50 item questionnaire, was mailed to all advertising agencies in the city of San Diego, California.

The mailing list for this study was compiled from agencies listed in Facts: San Diego Advertising Agencies - September 1985 (a Union-Tribune publication), and those listed in the January issue of the San Diego Communicator.

A cover letter explaining the purpose of the research, the questionnaire and a self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to 283 advertising agencies. Two weeks later a second mailing was done with a reminder, the questionnaire and a self-addressed stamped envelope. A total of 96 questionnaires were returned within the month long period allowed for data collection. The data, entered into the Cyber computer at San Diego State University, were checked for missing and out of range values. Returned blank questionnaires (due to incorrect addresses, agencies no longer in business, etc.) were eliminated from this study. The final n for this research was 76.

RESULTS: Organizational Attributes

The antecendent variables (frequently treated as independent variables) examined were divided into two groups: 1) organizational attributes and 2) individual practitioner attributes. Organizational attributes were measured by questionnaire items about the type of agency, number of employees, number of years in operation, and annual billing. Of the 76 usable self-reports, 60.8% were full service agencies. Professional/commercial agencies (including industrial, trade, financial and medical agencies) comprised 17.6% of the sample. The sample also included image agencies (including public relations and consulting firms), 12.2%. The remaining 9.5% of the sample were other types of agencies including: design studios, recruitment agencies and agencies specializing in magazine and/or general print media.

Close to one third of the agencies reported having three or fewer employees (32.9%), another third (31.6%) reported four to seven employees, and 35.5% reported eight or more employees. Eight agencies represented in this study are "one person shops" and one agency reported having more than 125 employees. The mean number of persons employed in agencies represented here is 10.4.

Approximately 16% of the agencies described here have been in business less than two years (SBA estimates show the first two years of a consulting service/consulting oriented business are the most difficult - firms passing the two year mark tend to continue on until - at least - the fifth year). Businesses active at least five years accounted for 39% of the sample and 35% reported being business from six to ten years. Roughly 27% reported having been in operation for over ten years.

For purposes of analysis, agencies were divided into three groups according to annual billing. Agencies that billed between 35 and 300 thousand dollars annually (32.3% of the sample) were considered small. Mid-sized agencies were those that billed between $350 and 1,400 per year (32.2%) and large agencies billed from 1,500 to more than 9,000 (remaining third of the sample).

Individual Attributes:

Individual attributes were tapped by asking about respondents' job title, type of work done, number of years in the field, number of years in the present firm, age, gender, education (highest degree held) and annual income (rounded to nearest thousand).

In addition to basic demographic items, questionnaire items dealt with how practitioners learn about current research in the field. Other items were designed to tap knowledge acquisition methods with respect to both

theoretical as well as applied research. This was measured in terms of respondents's attendance at national conferences and local meetings, and the number of journals and trade publications read. Several items asked about the classes (related to advertising) attended by practitioners, and about the degree to which colleagues, friends and consultants were utilized for information regarding research theory and practice.

Other measures dealt with membership in professional organizations at the local, regional and national levels. Finally, four items were designed to measure practitioners' general orientation to science.

Demographics:

The respondents' career positions were measured in two ways: first, by job title, and second, by job description. Later, these data were divided into three major categories: 1) Management, 2) Sales and 3) Creative. Of the sample, 80.3% had management positions including presidents, owners, vice-presidents, chairmen of the board (the population to which the questionnaires were mailed). Approximately 9.2% worked in sales (including account executives, media buyers and marketing directors). The remaining 10.5% had creative jobs (art directors, publicity/promotional positions, graphic designers and graphic directors).

Of the practitioners surveyed, 17.8% reported being employed in advertising for five years or less, 30% reported to have worked up to 10 years in the field, and 34% of the sample have been in the field of advertising more than 20 years. The average number of years in the field was 14.

One third (31.6%) of the respondents have been with their present firm for three or fewer years, while another third (32.9%) have been with their present firm for eight or more years.

Respondents ranged in age from 26 to 58 years with the average age around 40 years. Only 30% of the respondents were female.

Despite recent and highly visible technological errors, and in many cases low use of research within respondents' agencies, the vast majority of practitioners in this sample (84%) had very positive orientations to science. Only 16% showed a negative, or neutral orientation to science. There was a strong linear relationship (using Pearson Correlation Coefficients) between practitioners' perceptions of theoretical research and general orientation to science. Practitioners' perceptions of theoretical research correlated positively with their general orientation to science ($r = .3109$; $p = .004$).

The majority of respondents had either a B.A or a B.S. degree and 25% held an advanced degree (M.A., M.S. or M.B.A). Reported salaries ranged from $14,000 to $140,000 per year. The average annual income reported was $53,000.

The figures below show the advertising practitioners' attendance at conferences and meetings, the number and kinds of classes/seminars attended and membership in professional organizations. It is interesting to note that a majority (81%) of the respondents looked to or used colleagues, consultants and friends to acquire information regarding research theory and application. This networking was second only to the use of business and trade publications as a means of learning more about research.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

Agency Use of Research:

The dependent variables, agency use of research and practitioner perception of research were operationalized along two dimensions: applied research, and theoretical research. Agency use of research was measured in

terms of application for short term problem solving and long term policy planning. Perception was used as a measure of practitioner use of research in terms of its enlightenment function. Use and perception were measured using a seven point Likert-type scale. The "use" scale ranged from Never (1) to Always (7). Perception items were scaled from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7) - reflected for purposes of analysis.

Agency use of research was measured with 15 items, nine addressed the use of applied research, five addressed the use of theoretical research and one asked about agency use of consultants (regardless of the type of research being conducted). To provide consistency, the conceptual and operational definitions of applied and theoretical research were provided on the questionnaire. The following definitions, with a brief explanation, appeared above the questionnaire items addressing use of research.

> APPLIED RESEARCH: problem-oriented research designed to solve specific problems (for example, determining day-after-recall, choosing the best location for retail outlets, determining what product line modifications are needed and so forth).
>
> THEORETICAL RESEARCH: research leading to, and supporting models from which a more general understanding of the overall process and impact of advertising can be gained.

Examples of use items include: This agency uses applied research to help solve immediate, short-term problems; This agency uses applied research to learn about audiences; This agency uses theoretical research to help with long term planning.

Responses on the nine items used to tap agency use of applied research were summed to create a new scale, also ranging from Never (1) to Always (7). One fourth of the agencies sampled reported rarely using (Never to Once-in-a While) applied research, while 60% (59.5) reported using research often, frequently or always. Ten agencies (15.6%) used applied research

about half of the time.

Half of the agencies that used applied research also used theoretical research on a regular basis. Only 31.4% used theoretical research often to always. These particular results were not surprising, given that applied research can often help directly with day to day problem solving and is therefore more obvious and visible.

Practitioner Perception of Research: Applied

Following the items related to agency use of research, eight questions were asked to tap individual respondent's perception of research, applied and theoretical. Four items pertained to applied research and four to theoretical. A brief introductory paragraph explained that the purpose of these questions was to learn about practitioner opinions regardless of the practices of the given agency. Examples of perception items are; Theoretical research is generally too confusing to be of value to advertising practitioners; Applied research is useful in terms of solving immediate, specific problems; Theoretical research provides the theory and models necessary for success in advertising.

There were no strong negative perceptions with respect to the value of applied research. While 5.6% reported some negative perceptions (Disagree) and 19.4% were neutral, 75% of the sample had positive or very positive perceptions of the usefulness of applied research.

Using analysis of variance, relationships between individual attributes (job title/position, years in the field, and methods used to learn about current research findings), and practitioners perceptions of applied research were measured. Also explored were the relationships between practitioners' orientation to science and their perceptions of the value of applied research. No significant relationships between practitioners' perception of applied research and individual attributes

were found. A significant relationship existed between practitioners perceptions of applied research and "other" sources (open-ended item) used to learn about current research findings. As might be expected, a significant relationship between practitioners' perceptions of applied research and their general orientation to science was not found.

Practitioner Perceptions of Research: Theoretical

Similar to what was found with applied research, general perceptions of theoretical research were favorable. While 14% had negative perceptions of this type of research and its value in advertising, 78% had very positive perceptions.

As with applied research, the study looked for significant relationships between practitioners perceptions of theoretical research and individual attributes, none were found.

A strong linear relationship (using Pearson Correlation Coefficients) between practitioners' perceptions of theoretical research and general orientation to science. The more favorable practitioners' perceptions of theoretical research, the more positive was the general orientation to science ($r = .3109$; $p = .004$).

Practitioner Perception of Research and Agency Use:

It is important to remember that questionnaire and cover letters were mailed to owners and presidents of advertising agencies in San Diego. Although, in roughly 20% of the cases, persons outside of upper management did complete the instruments, the majority of respondents were in management positions. This is important when looking at the relationships between practitioners' perceptions of research, and the use of research by the agency in which they work - managers tend to have greater influence on

tasks undertaken by the agency in general. This is especially the case with smaller agencies.

Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients, a significant relationship between practitioner perception of applied research, and agency use of applied research ($r = .6172$; $p = .001$; $n = 62$) was found. This was also the case with respect to practitioners' perceptions of theoretical research and agency use of theoretical research ($r = .6187$; $p =$

In addition, although no significant relationships between general orientation to science and agency use of applied research were found, there was a significant relationship between practitioner orientation to science and agency use of theoretical research ($r = .2214$; $p = .035$; $n = 68$).

DISCUSSION / RECOMMENDATIONS:

The data presented here help to draw an over-all profile of advertising agencies in one mid-sized market on the west coast. This research was an attempt to measure individual attributes of advertising practitioners, primarily at management levels. Managers were chosen because they are the driving force of an agency and often influence other practitioners employed by the agency.

These data show that applied research is being used frequently in day-to-day problem solving contexts. Theoretical research, on the other hand, appears, at first glance, to be rarely used. These initial findings confirm what has been suggested in the literature regarding the high visibility of applied research.

For the most part, practitioners have positive perceptions with respect to the value of applied research. These positive perceptions however, were not significantly related to individual attributes such as job title/description or years in the field. Nor were these perceptions

related to the methods practitioners used to learn about current research findings. One exception to this was that practitioners reported using "Other" sources and that those other sources do play a significant role in the perceptions held with respect to applied research. Therefore, further research should explore the source of these perceptions.

Because this one exception did not hold in terms of theoretical research the following questions are suggested: What "other" sources are being accessed with respect to information regarding applied research and why are these sources being accessed in terms of applied research and not for theoretical research? While a content analysis of the open-ended responses relating to "other" sources may shed insight to the first question, the second question remains more illusive. Further use of focus groups and face-to-face interviews may be needed.

Practitioners' orientation to science, as one might predict, did not have a significant relationship with perceptions of applied research.

As with applied research, the data show consistently positive practitioner perceptions with respect to theoretical research. Again, these perceptions are not related to individual attributes, or to methods used to learn more about theoretical research. General orientation to science however, did relate to perceptions of theoretical research. In this strong linear relationship, the more positive practitioners' orientations to science, the more favorable the perception of theoretical research.

Most striking of the findings is the strong, positive relationship between practitioner perception of research and agency use of research. This relationship held for both applied and theoretical research.

Although it appears, at first, that theoretical research is seldom used (compared with applied research), the positive and significant

relationship between perception and use, for both types of research, suggests concurrence with Weiss' (1980) speculation that theoretical research is, in fact, used more than what appears initially.

In addition, perceptions, as a measurement of the enlightenment function - a longer range kind of use -- appears from these findings, to be a viable and useful concept. The data, therefore, help to support Despande' (1982) call for use of this concept when measuring the long term use - enlightenment function - of advertising research.

In sum, these findings support Weiss's contention that research is frequently used by the advertising community. This is the case even though it is not always highly visible or easy to measure, (ie. long term functions). This finding also supports the value of employing Despande conceptualization of "perceptions of research" when measuring this long-term, enlightenment function use.

Further research should now look at the differences between applied and theoretical research in terms of the frequency of use. Also, further research is clearly needed in terms of the relationship between theoretical and applied research. A study using a larger sample of practitioners is called for, as is a related study directed to academics involved in the areas of advertising and consumer research.

These data are encouraging data because they suggest that the gap between academics and advertising practitioners (with respect to research) may not be as large as had earlier been thought. Narrowing of gaps, or tensions, in this or any discipline can be perceived as good and certainly advantageous to any parties concerned.

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FIGURE 1

HOW DO YOU LEARN ABOUT CURRENT ADVERTISING RESEARCH FINDINGS?

METHOD OF LEARNING	YES RESPONSES	NO RESPONSES
Attend meetings of local, professional organizations	56.0%	44.0%
Attend meetings of national, professional organizations	36.0%	64.0%
Attend seminars/take classes	50.7%	49.3%
Read business/trade publications	96.0%	4.0%
Read scholarly publications	22.7%	77.3%
Personal exchange with colleagues, consultants and friends	81.3%	18.7%
Other means	8.0%	92.0%

FIGURE 2

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS DO YOU BELONG TO?

ORGANIZATION	BELONG TO	DON'T BELONG TO
American Association of Advertising Agencies	17.3%	82.7%
American Marketing Association	21.3%	78.7%
California Press Women	0.0%	100.0%
Friends of Journalism (SDSU)	4.0%	96.0%
International Association of Business Communicators	8.0%	92.0%
Public Relations Society of America	14.7%	85.3%
San Diego Association of Advertising Agencies	22.7%	77.3%
San Diego Advertising Club	45.3%	54.7%
San Diego Communication Art Group	30.7%	69.3%
Sigma Delta Chi	4.0%	96.0%
Society for the Marketing of Professional Services	0.0%	100.0%
Other organization	33.3%	66.7%